



BENEFITS OF RECREATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH: SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE



Recreation for Mental Health is an initiative designed to strengthen partnerships, enhance capacity, and create supportive environments to enable all Nova Scotians to have opportunities to experience the mental wellbeing benefits of recreation, physical activity, sport, and play.

This project is a collaboration between Recreation Nova Scotia (RNS), Dalhousie University and the Canadian Mental Health Association (Nova Scotia), which was funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness.

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recreationns.ns.ca/mental-health-and-recreation

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WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO DO THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

To make the case for recreation for our mental health as well as amalgamate existing research into an easy to read document.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

To detail the benefits of community recreation for individuals with mental illnesses

HOW WAS THE PROJECT DONE?

A systematic literature search was conducted in pertinent bibliographic databases. Papers were included that emphasized adults with a mental illness, programs or initiatives from recreation or mental health sector that were participant or instructor led, and programs that intentionally addressed psychosocial outcomes, social inclusion, or increased participation as an outcome. The initial search identified 10,000 potentially relevant articles. A team of seven researchers systematically reviewed these articles for relevance and scientific rigor. Thirty-five articles met the studies inclusion criteria. This paper provided a synthesis of the results of these 35 studies.

WHY SHOULD YOU KEEP READING?

Recreation, broadly defined, has benefits for our mental health: All types of recreation including social recreation (e.g., playing cards and bowling), creative pursuits (e.g., music and art), and physical activity (e.g., walking, swimming), are good for our mental health.

WHAT WERE KEY FINDINGS?

CONTEXT:

The Canadian National Recreation Agenda defines recreation as the “experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing” (1).

RESULTS:

RECREATION OF ALL KINDS BENEFITS OUR MENTAL HEALTH through social, psychological, practical, and physical impacts.

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF RECREATION ACTIVITIES INCLUDE: expanded social networks (e.g., people in the program made new friends) (2), opportunities for social connection (e.g., a sense of connection and belonging), change in social skills (e.g., focusing less on self and more on others), and social inclusion (e.g., the recreation activity increased access to community and community resources) (3, 4)

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF RECREATION ACTIVITIES INCLUDE: Increased self-esteem, flow (i.e., absorption in the present moment) (5), sense of accomplishment, increased self-confidence (6, 7), reduced stress and increased ability to cope (8,9), improved life satisfaction (5), and increased ability to management depressive symptoms (8,11).

PRACTICAL IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY RECREATION PARTICIPATION INCLUDE: providing routine and structure (10) as well as practical skills that can be used in other areas of life (11).

IMPACTS FROM PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Physical activity can impact cardiovascular health (12) and can help you sleep better (6,13).

CONCLUSION:

Recreation is good for our mental health (14).

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